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The Effect of Direct and Indirect Corrective Feedback on Iranian EFL Students' Willingness to Communicate and their Writing Proficiency

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ABSTRACT

Academic writing is a skill which is learned in an academic setting. Learners need frequent feedback in order to improve their writing skill. Considering the importance of the writing skill, the present study investigated the effect of direct and indirect corrective feedback on Iranian EFL learners' willingness to communicate and their writing proficiency. To this purpose, four intermediate classes from Tehran institute in Khorramabad were chosen. Sixty participants were randomly selected from these four different classes as the samples, which were all female learners and their ages were between 19-22 years old. The researcher administered the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) as the test of language proficiency to make sure that the two groups were homogenized. The homogenized participants were put in two experimental groups. Then, they were given WTC questionnaire. Next, they were given a topic each session to write a paragraph of maximum 100 words. The first group received direct feedback on the writing skill. Here, the teacher clearly indicated that the student's utterance or writing was incorrect and the teacher provided the correct form. In the indirect corrective feedback group, the teacher indicated that an error existed but did not provide the correction. At ten session both experimental groups were given WTC questionnaire once again. The findings were as follows: 1) effectiveness of direct corrective feedback in the WTC of the learners, 2) effectiveness of the indirect corrective feedback in the WTC of the learners, 3) effectiveness of the direct corrective feedback in the composition writing of the learners, 4) effectiveness of indirect corrective feedback in the composition writing of the learners, 5) superiority of the indirect corrective feedback group over the direct corrective feedback group in WTC, and 6) superiority of the direct corrective feedback group in improving the participants' composition writing ability over the indirect corrective feedback group. EFL students and teachers can benefit from the findings of this study.

Keywords: Corrective Feedback, EFL Learners, Willingness to Communicate, Writing Proficiency

Introduction

The ability to communicate in a second language has been the goal and of great interest for many people. In fact, the use of the target language is one of the main purposes in learning second languages for many L2 learners, and it has been widely assumed that the use of the target language is also an indicator of and a necessary condition for successful language learning [1,2]. In fact, following the advent of learner-centered approaches and the subsequent attention to the learner, willingness to communicate (WTC) emerged as a psycho-social attribute and was investigated along with such factors as motivation, attitude, anxiety, personality and self-confidence. Thus, this factor was considered very crucial which could lead to learner variation and accounted for

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successful second language learning. The term WTC was employed by McCroskey and his associates to describe "the individual's personality-based predisposition towards approaching or avoiding the initiation of communication when free to do so" [3]. McCroskey and Richmond [4] advanced the construct of "willingness to communicate" to refer to an individual's general personality orientation toward talking. While talking is the key to interpersonal communication, people differ in the amount of talk in which they will choose to engage. It is assumed that the degree of WTC is a factor in learning a second language and the ability to communicate in that language. The higher WTC a speaker has, the more likely he is to succeed in second language (L2) acquisition. High WTC is associated with an increased frequency and amount of communication [5].

On the contrary, MacIntyre, Clément, Dornyei, and Noels [6] did not treat WTC in L2 as a personality trait but as a situational variable that has both transient and enduring influences. Moreover, they theorized that WTC influence not only speaking mode but also listening, writing and reading modes. Therefore, it can be stated that WTC has a direct relationship with language proficiency. Commonly speaking, language proficiency or linguistic proficiency is the ability of an individual to speak or perform in an acquired language. However, language proficiency is not just limited to speaking and in fact refers to a person's ability to use a language for a variety of purposes, including speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

One of the factors which seems to be of high importance in language proficiency is the writing ability. There's no question that writing is a complex skill in nature, that's why it always absorbs so much attention as one of the four main language skills and needs much practice to be mastered [7]. One of the factors which can help learners improve their writing proficiency is the use of corrective feedback. In language acquisition feedback is used to give information to learners which they can use to revise their language. According to Ellis [8], a distinction is often made between positive and negative feedback (the latter is sometimes referred to as 'negative evidence'). Negative feedback refers to information that indicates a hypothesis is incorrect. The term corrective feedback is increasingly used in preference to negative feedback. Corrective feedback can be implicit or explicit; it can also be input-providing or output-prompting [9]. Feedback is usually provided by the teacher and sometimes by the peer. If feedback is appropriately used, students can benefit from the proper corrections [10].

Taking the above points into account, more specifically getting to know that corrective feedback can have positive effects on the writing proficiency of the students, the present study aims to investigate the possible effects of corrective feedback on the WTC and writing proficiency of Iranian EFL learners. Many studies have been done on the nature of willingness to communicate as a psych-social factor, since the emergence of learner-centered methodologies and the emphasis on learner characteristics. However, almost all these researches have considered WTC as a personality or situational trait which is influenced by many cognitive and affective factors. These studies have been one-dimensional and have investigated the effect of such factors as motivation, anxiety, perceived self-confidence, self-perception, communication apprehension, self-efficacy, self-esteem, extroversion vs. introversion, etc. on the learners' tendency to talk and take part in actual communication.

Since WTC is a variable, it can be influenced by several factors. One such factor is the corrective feedback. Although teachers might be aware of the importance of corrective feedback in their classroom learning, a few try to investigate its effect on something rather than writing proficiency. There seems to be a paucity of research in conducting on the effect of corrective feedback on WTC and writing proficiency at the same time. This study, therefore, aims at finding the possible effects of corrective feedback on WTC and writing proficiency of Iranian intermediate EFL learners [8,9]

This section explains the methodology used to conduct the study. Information about participants' age, gender, and level of proficiency is given. After that, the instruments which were used in this study are introduced such as the placement test, pretest and posttest. Next, the processes which the researcher and participants went through are mentioned. It should also be mentioned that this research used quantitative descriptive design. This type of research uses quantitative methods to describe what is, describing, recording, analyzing, and interpreting conditions that exist. It involves some types of comparison or contrast and attempts to discover relationships between existing non-manipulated variables. Some forms of statistical analysis are used to describe the results of the study [11]. In this type of research, the researcher has a clearly defined research question to which objective answers are sought, all aspects are carefully and precisely designed before data collection, data are in the form of numbers, statistics, and project can be used to generalize concepts more widely, and predict future results or investigate causal relationships.

Design

The design of the study was quasi-experimental because the participants were not randomly assigned. The study had a pretest/posttest design with control and experimental groups.

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Participants

For the purpose of this study, four intermediate classes from Tehran institute in Khorramabad were chosen. Sixty participants were selected randomly from these four different classes as the samples, which were all female learners; their ages were between 19-22 years old. The participants were put into two equal groups. The researcher administered the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) as the test of language proficiency to make sure that the two groups were homogenized.

Data Collection Instruments

Oxford Proficiency Test (OPT)

In order to measure and determine the participants' level of general English language proficiency and ensure their homogeneity, they were required to take the standard OPT test (2001). The Oxford Placement Test (OPT) is primarily used in order to measure and determine the participants' level of general English language proficiency and ensure their homogeneity. The OPT is often used by ELT researchers as the language proficiency test in which participants scoring one standard deviation above and one standard deviation below the mean are considered homogenized members. This test consists of 60 items in the form of multiple choice questions, and students are supposed to choose the correct answer from among the alternatives. The required time to complete the test is 30 minutes. The reliability of the OPT has been reported by Hamidi [12] to be .82 using KR-21 formula having seventy students studying New Interchange 3 and .86 using a test-retest method with a 2-week interval having ninety students almost finishing Four Corners 4, both of which show high reliability index.

Results

Results of the OPT used as the Homogeneity Test

Sixty participants were invited to the study. They took the Oxford Placement Test (OPT). The descriptive statistics for the OPT Test are displayed in the following table.

Table 1. The Descriptive Statistics of the OPT Test

Language Prof		
N	Valid	60
	Missing	0
Mean		26.1667
Std. Deviation		5.63334
Minimum		14.00
Maximum		37.00

The sixty participants were randomly divided into two groups. In order to prove that researchers had homogenized participants in terms of their general English language proficiency, the independent t-test was run. The results of descriptive and inferential statistics are displayed in tables 2 and 3, respectively.

Table 2. Group Statistics for the Two Direct and Indirect Groups

	Group12		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Language Prof	dimension1	1.00	30	26.1000	5.05385	.92270
		2.00	30	26.2333	6.24601	1.14036

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In order to show that there was no significant difference between the learners in the two groups, the independent t- test which shows the mean score differences between the two groups was performed. The results are presented below.

Table 3. Independent T-test for the Comparison of Groups before Treatment

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Language Prof	Equal variances assumed	5.100	.028	.091	58	.928	-.13333	1.46690
	Equal variances not assumed			-.091	55.580	.928	-.13333	1.46690

As Table 2 shows, the two groups were homogeneous in terms of their language proficiency (t (58) = .928, p>.05).

Analysis of the First Research Question

The first research question of this study was:

Is there any significant relationship between the participants' scores on the WTC questionnaire before and after receiving the direct corrective feedback? The following table shows the normality test for the two sets of scores.

Table 4. Results of the Normality Test for WTC Pre-Scores

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Direct WTC Pre	.198	30	.004	.864	30	.001
Direct WTC Post	.253	30	.000	.808	30	.000

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

As it can be seen in Table 4.4, the data are not normally distributed for the two sets of pretest scores, The significant value of the Shapiro-Wilk Test is lower than .05 (p<.05). Therefore, the nonparametric Wilcoxon Singed-Rank test was used for pre/post WTC comparison. As it can be seen in Table 5, 2 had lower ranks, 24 had higher ranks, and there were 4 ties scores in comparison with the pre-WTC scores. Table 5 shows the results of the Wilcoxon Singed-Rank Test.

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Table 5. Ranks Table for the Pre-Scores of WTC within the Direct Group

		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Direct WTC Post – Direct WTC Pre	Negative Ranks	2[a]	4.50	9.00
	Positive Ranks	24[b]	14.25	342.00
	Ties	4[c]		
		30		

a. Direct WTC Post < Direct WTC Pre

b. Direct WTC Post > Direct WTC Pre

c. Direct WTC Post = Direct WTC Pre

Table 6. Results of the Wilcoxon Singed-Rank Test for Pre-Scores of WTC within the Direct Group

	Direct WTC Post – Direct WTC Pre
Z	-4.249[a]
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

a. Based on negative ranks.

b. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

The Wilcoxon Singed-Rank Test was run to compare the mean scores of WTC within the direct corrective feedback group. The result of the Wilcoxon Singed-Rank Test showed that there was a statistically significant difference within this group ($Z=4.24$, $p = .000<0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between the participants 'scores on the WTC questionnaire before and after receiving the direct corrective feedback was rejected, putting an emphasis on the effectiveness of direct corrective feedback in the WTC of the learners.

Analysis of the Second Research Question

The second research question of this study was: Is there any significant relationship between the participants' scores on the WTC questionnaire before and after receiving the indirect corrective feedback? The following table shows the normality test for the two sets of scores. As it can be seen in Table 7, the significant value of the Shapiro-Wilk Test is lower than 0.05 for the both sets of scores, meaning that the two sets of scores are not normally distributed. Therefore, the best test for the comparison of means would be the Wilcoxon Singed-Rank Test.

Conclusion

As the final section, this part deals with the conclusions drawn out of the results of the study. In the discussion section, the findings of the present study are compared with those of other research studies conducted. Some limitations of the research along with some implications in classroom learning are discussed. Suggestions for further research appear at the end of this section. This study was an attempt to empirically examine the effect of direct and indirect corrective feedback on Iranian EFL students' WTC and their writing proficiency. What comes below is a summary of the findings and conclusion drawn out of testing each research hypothesis.

The research result rejected the first research hypothesis that there was no significant relationship between the participants 'scores on the WTC questionnaire before and after receiving the direct corrective feedback, putting an emphasis on the effectiveness of direct

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corrective feedback in the WTC of the learners. As to the second research hypothesis, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis that there was no significant relationship between the participants' scores on the WTC questionnaire before and after receiving the indirect corrective feedback, putting an emphasis on the effectiveness of the indirect corrective feedback in the WTC of the learners.

Table 7. Results of the Normality Test for WTC Scores within the Indirect Group

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Indirect WTC Pre	.217	30	.001	.845	30	.000
Indirect WTC Post	.263	30	.000	.804	30	.000

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

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